

DEVELOPING STORM

The trillion gallons of water Hurricane Harvey dropped on Harris County in August revealed the downside of Houston’s dynamic economy. And the Corps of Engineers suddenly was faced with an awful choice.



Water is released from Addicks Reservoir on Aug. 29, a first for the Corps of Engineers during a major storm. Brett Coomer / Houston Chronicle

Probes target Mattress Firm’s buyer

Steinhoff’s stock tanks on reports it inflated income

By Katherine Blunt

The South African corporation that owns Mattress Firm has lost its CEO, watched its stock price plunge by more than 80 percent and launched an investigation to determine whether it inflated reports of its financial performance as it grew through a series of acquisitions.

Steinhoff International, a retail conglomerate that last year paid \$3.8 billion to acquire the Houston-based mattress chain, is assessing the “validity and recoverability” of more than \$7 billion in assets. PricewaterhouseCoopers has been tapped to investigate accounting irregularities. And officials in South Africa and Germany, where its stock is traded, have launched probes to determine whether the company mislead investors.

Steinhoff’s former CEO, Markus Jooste, resigned this week amid a disclosure that the company may have to revise financial statements

Mattress continues on A16

Texas GOP lawmaker faces more accusers

Farenthold says his staff underwent sensitivity training

By Kevin Diaz

WASHINGTON — Already under fire in an ongoing sexual harassment investigation, Texas Republican Blake Farenthold revealed Friday that he and his entire congressional staff underwent sensitivity and sexual harassment training last year after two female staffers complained of gender discrimination and “sexualized commentary” in his Capitol Hill office.

The women’s complaints in 2016 followed that of former spokeswoman Lauren Greene, who had recently settled a federal lawsuit that accused Farenthold of sexual harassment and of firing her in retaliation for her complaint.

Farenthold continues on A16

More allegations

» Arizona Rep. Trent Franks resigns amid accusations he offered an aide \$5 million to carry his child. Page A8

Nature ruled, man reacted. Harvey was Houston’s reckoning.

By Susan Carroll

ADDICKS PROJECT OFFICE, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

KATY

SUNDAY AUG. 27, 11:45 P.M.

49 HOURS, 45 MINUTES AFTER HARVEY’S LANDFALL

Inside a squat, brick building at the base of Barker reservoir, Richard Long tossed and turned in his cot near midnight.

Dread and adrenaline kept him from drifting off.

Water levels at the Addicks and Barker dams west

of Houston, the city’s primary defense during a major storm, were rising faster than he’d seen in his 38 years with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Addicks had climbed 28 feet since Hurricane Harvey made landfall along the central Texas coast on Aug. 25, two days earlier. Barker had risen 22 feet. Both dams likely would break their record pool levels within 24 hours.

After decades of successfully taming Buffalo Bayou by impounding storm runoff inside the reservoirs until the skies cleared, the Corps had finally faced its Sophie’s Choice with Harvey: release water

during a monster storm and doom houses along the bayou, or risk letting the water flow out from around the ends of the dams and over the emergency spillways — perhaps triggering a much bigger disaster.

Uncontrolled flows would risk erosion and failure of the earthen berms, potentially sending a catastrophic wall of water into the heart of the nation’s fourth-largest city. If the dams failed, thousands could die.

The Corps had announced that releases would start at 2 a.m. at Addicks — two hours away. But the reservoirs were

rising faster than engineers had predicted.

And even with the releases, the Corps’ models showed the reservoir pool would climb so high that water would flow around the north end of Addicks for the first time in the dam’s 70 years of operation.

The releases also wouldn’t spare homes built within the footprint of the reservoirs as the water level climbed toward the spillway. Many of those homes were doomed, too, Long knew.

Rain thrashed the roof.

Long’s mind raced from the dams to his wife, who was

Storm continues on A12

Hurricane Harvey dumped an unprecedented amount of rain on Houston, but the resulting damage was multiplied by decisions made — and not made — during the past 50 years. During the next two weeks, a Houston Chronicle investigation will explain why the August storm was both a natural and man-made disaster.

TODAY	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4	PART 5	PART 6	PART 7
Cheap housing, lax regulation carries a huge price tag.	Cheap premiums, billions in debt. Families get trapped, taxpayers soaked.	Build in a floodway? It’s the Houston way.	Fort Bend levees were designed for the 100-year storm. Is it enough?	How Houston’s growth weakened the dams that made it possible.	Developments around Barker: risky reservoir business.	They tamed the North Sea. What can the Dutch do for Houston?

» See a timeline of the storm and interactive maps at houstonchronicle.com/developingstorm

Former land commissioner seeks office again

Patterson critical of Bush on Alamo, storm recovery

By Alejandra Matos and Mike Ward

AUSTIN — Setting up a high-profile 2018 Republican primary battle, former Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson confirmed Friday he will challenge incumbent George P. Bush, the man who replaced him

as the state’s land commissioner in the last election.

The winner of what has turned into a crowded Republican primary for the job could face Miguel Suazo, an Austin-based energy attorney and likely the first office-seeker to launch his campaign with proceeds from investing in Bitcoin.

Patterson, who was first elected as the state’s land commissioner in 2003, wants to head the agency

that manages state-owned lands and the Alamo. He gave up the job to run for lieutenant governor in 2014 but came in last in a four-way GOP primary race.

Patterson has long been critical of Bush, including the office’s response to Hurricane Harvey. Since 2011, the office also has overseen housing recovery efforts after natural disasters.

Primary continues on A16



Houston Chronicle file

Former Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson says he’s running again because he’s unhappy with incumbent George P. Bush.



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